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THE EFFECT OF PREVIOUS POVERTY EXPERIENCE ON SUCCESS IN TEACHER CORPS PRESERVICE PROGRAMS.

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NATIONAL TEACHER CORPS INTERNS ENROLLED IN A PROGRAM FOR TEACHING THE DISADVANTAGED (TYPICAL NUMBER OF 35 TO 40 PERSONS) WERE RATED BY FACULTY MEMBERS AT EIGHT UNIVERSITIES ON (1) ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE, (2) TEACHING AND FIELD PERFORMANCE, (3) RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DISADVANTAGED, (4) PERSONAL STABILITY AND STRENGTH, (5) INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS, AND (6) COMMITMENT AND GENERAL PROMISE. DIFFERENCES IN RATINGS WERE EXAMINED AMONG INTERNS WHO VARIED IN DURATION AND TYPE OF PREVIOUS POVERTY EXPERIENCE, THAT IS, (1) NO POVERTY AREA EXPERIENCE, (2) LESS THAN 1 YEAR OF EXPERIENCE IN A POVERTY AREA, (3) AT LEAST 1 YEAR OF HAVING WORKED IN A POVERTY AREA OR LIVED IN A POVERTY AREA, OR BOTH LIVED AND WORKED IN POVERTY AREAS. ALL RAW SCORES WERE CONVERTED TO STANDARD SCORES WITHIN EACH PROGRAM. THE GROUP WITH LESS THAN 1 YEAR OF POVERTY AREA EXPERIENCE SCORED SIGNIFICANTLY HIGHER THAN EACH OF THE OTHER GROUPS. THE AUTHORS HYPOTHESIZED THAT THOSE WITH LESS THAN A YEAR OF POVERTY EXPERIENCE WERE LARGELY MIDDLE-CLASS, WELL-EDUCATED COLLEGE GRADUATES WHO HAVE SUFFICIENT MOTIVATION, IDEALISM, AND INITIATIVE TO SPEND A LONG VACATION IN VOLUNTEER POVERTY WORK AND THAT SINCE RATINGS WERE OF PERFORMANCE IN THE PROGRAM RATHER THAN ON THE JOB, THIS GROUP WOULD BE EXPECTED TO DO BETTER. NEVERTHELESS, THEY FELT THAT IT IS STILL POSSIBLE THAT ONE OF THE OTHER GROUPS WOULD BE MORE EFFECTIVE IN ACTUAL WORK WITH THE DISADVANTAGED BECAUSE OF THEIR GREATER EXPERIENCE WITH SUCH PERSONS. (LC)

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THE EFFECT OF PREVIOUS POVERTY EXPERIENCE ON SUCCESS IN TEACHER CORPS PRESERVICE PROGRAMS

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Written into the Law establishing the Office of Economic Opportunity is a statement specifically requiring the "maximum feasible participation of the poor" in the new program. The intent of this requirement presumably was that an involvement of the disadvantaged in the control of their own destiny be elicited, and that some of the considerable sums paid in salary money to program staff be distributed to the poor.

Perhaps as a result of implicity expressed intent in the language of the law, or of bias on the part of professional staff members of the poverty programs, a myth has arisen. The belief is one that proclaims that individuals with personal experience in poverty are superior as staff members in poverty programs. This myth has become in many instances an unstated policy. It likely affects hiring practices, funding decisions and, perhaps, evaluation efforts.

A literature search, and a series of conversations with poverty program staff members have failed to reveal data relevant to a testing of this myth. (Myth is used not in a pejorative sense but rather to indicate an accepted but empirically unsupported hypothesis.)

A study, (1) of the training of individuals from poverty to be teacher aides, suggests so far that the group drawn from the poor carry the same range of abilities as other similar middle class groups, although

the design does not provide for such a direct comparison.

Reactions of others to a discussion of the aforementioned myth are varied. A psychologist at Job Corps expressed interest, and stated that as far as he know, this question represents a "vast area of ignorance." A Community Action Program official from the Office of Economic Opportunity, with whom this present study was discussed, offered suggestions and advice on design and execution and then said she couldn't really see any point to such a study since "of course, those with a disadvantaged background would do better."

Comments and opinions abound but published studies are not available. It was for this reason that an exploratory study, however limited, seemed proper and necessary. This paper, therefore, is an exploration of the effectiveness of individuals with personal experience in poverty in a program designed to train teachers in reaching and teaching the disadvantaged child.

The National Teacher Corps, created by the Higher Education Act of 1965, has as its purpose - in President Johnson's words - to "improve the quality of teaching where quality is most needed and in short supply - in city slums and areas of rural poverty." Corpsmembers serve in teams, comprised of a team leader who is an experienced teacher, and (usually) four to six interns who are relatively inexperienced teacher trainees.

All Corpsmembers go through a preservice educational program of 8-12 weeks. Forty-two of these programs, with an average enrollment of 35-40, took place during the summer of 1966 at various colleges and universities. Interns and experienced teachers attend classes together, work in practical in poverty areas together, and generally meet informally, developing close professional relationships. They are taught by faculty largely recruited from other schools and selected on the basis of some special competence or knowledge in regard to aspects of the education of disadvantaged children.

Team leaders are certified and usually have a master's degree. They have taught in slum schools for about five years. Interns are college graduates, 83.5 percent of them with liberal arts, business, and science degrees. Some of the present interns -- about 16.5 percent -- majored in education, and some others have taught before. The intent of the program is to attract new highly motivated and talented people, some of whom would have been lost to teaching due to the attractions of other professional and service opportunities, to teach disadvantaged children.

Of the Corpsmembers, 48 percent are men and 52 percent are women. The average age of interns is 24 and average age for experienced teachers is 36. Forty percent of the Teacher Corpsmen and women are married, and many have children.

70 percent of Teacher Corpsmembers focus on elementary education, 30 percent on secondary. Corpsmembers come from every State in the Union

but Alaska.

Many Corpsmembers come from backgrounds which include personal experience with poverty, and many do not. This study is designed to test the relationship between previous personal experience with poverty and performance in the preservice phase of the Teacher Corps.

II. METHOD

Toward the end of preservice programs Corpsmembers were rated by faculty members on several dimensions. An evaluation form was completed by faculty members and (for some interns) by team leaders, with numerical ratings which when summarized provided scores on six variables (Appendix 1). These were: Academic Performance (AC), Teaching and Field Performance (TFP), Relationship with the Disadvantaged (RD), Personal Stability and Strength (PSS), Interpersonal Effectiveness (IE), and Commitment and General Promis (CGP).

Not all programs cooperated equally well in completing and returning this information to the Washington Office of Teacher Corps by the time this Study began. Among the programs from which usable data were received were University of Southern Illinois, University of Houston, North Carolina College at Durham, University of Omaha, Temple University, University of Pittsburgh, University of Georgia, and University of Miami, and interns from these programs comprise the sample used in this study. Ratings were

made by at least two raters for every intern in the sample. However, several variables were not rated for all interns by each program, and therefore N differs in the analyses of the separate variables.

Data in regard to duration and type of previous poverty experience was obtained from the applications originally submitted by each intern, and each intern was coded N (no poverty experience), N+ (poverty experience of less than one year), W (worked in poverty), L (lived in poverty), or B (both lived and worked in poverty). For categories L, W, and B, experience of at least one year is implied. All categories are mutually exclusive.

Six one-way analyses of variance were done, testing separately for each variable differences in scores among poverty experience groups. Because preliminary inspects of the data suggested it, and because there is a promising rationale available for positive results, among-groups sums of squares were partitioned to test the N+ groups against all other groups within each variable. An overall among-groups F was also obtained for each analysis.

Since different programs may have had interns with different meaning levels of ability, and also may have groups of different rating standards, raw scores were not comparable between programs. All raw scores were converted to standard scores $\left(\frac{\bar{x} - x}{\sigma}\right)$ within each program and analyses were done on these converted scores.

The sample used for this study is not a truly random one. It is biased because these interns are part of the group of interns for whom fairly complete data was gathered. Obviously, the possibility exists that these interns may differ as a group in some respects from interns for whom no, or inadequate, or late data was obtained.

III. RESULTS

The mean standard scores for each poverty condition for each variable are presented in Table 1. Higher scores mean greater ability for each variable.

In each case the group with less than one year of experience in poverty scored higher than any other group.

Tables 2 through 6 present the results of the analyses of variance performed for each of the preservice variables. In each case a significant F-ratio was obtained for the effect of the N+ group versus all other groups combined. In only one case (Variable AC-Academic Performance and Promise), however, was the F-ratio for total among-groups variance significant. It may be argued that in the light of this lack of significance the above partitioning of the among-groups sum of squares is not legitimate, since higher scores for N+ were not predicted in advance. However, no claim is made for this data which violates the strictures imposed upon its interpretation by that objection. This effect should, of course, be tested again independently, and only if observed again and

with appropriate controls should great confidence be placed in its validity.

IV. DISCUSSION

The authors feel it likely, on the basis of the data presented herein, that there does exist an effect of previous poverty experience on success in Teacher Corps preservice programs. There are many bases on which objection may be raised to this statement.

The rationale which we find promising as a possible explanation for these results, and which is certainly amenable to empirical test, is that the N+ group represents the bright, young, dedicated, largely middle class, largely well educated college graduates who have sufficient motivation, idealism, and initiative to spend, perhaps, a long vacation in a migrant labor camp or to volunteer during the academic year to work in an East Harlem Settlement House. This is the less-than-one years experience which we suspect is represented by this group. We would expect these people to do better than probably any other group in a preservice program of this type. They are dedicated, young, energetic, and intelligent. Coupled with experience, it is not surprising that they will show up better than others who may have even more to offer in a program involving more direct action rather than one which emphasizes learning at least

equally as strongly as personal contact with the disadvantaged.

Poverty experience groups may be different in regard to race, education, sex, age, and a host of other possible variables. All interns are college graduates (a few have some post-college credits, and a very few have master's degrees), and there is no hard data available to us on quality of college and pre-college training. However, we can offer data on race, sex, and age. These data are based on responses from only a part of our sample, i.e., those interns from programs which turned in to us ratings on all six dependent variables. This may or may not imply bias on this sub-sample. N's differ because, as always, not all respondents respond to all items (e.g., one intern listed his race as "off-white").

It appears that while age may be partially confounded with poverty, there is no reason to believe this to be the case for race and sex. We cannot offer a test of relationships between each of these background variables and our major dependent variables at this time. There is some reason to expect that younger people will tend to outshine older people in a training program, simply because they are more recently accustomed to school procedures any may be able to learn more quickly. However, only variable AC (ratings of Academic Performance and Promise) is directly related to academics. It is obvious that younger individuals are more likely to have had either no, or less than one year, experience in anything than older individuals simply because they have had less time. With a

larger group of interns it is likely that appropriate tests could be made to provide these controls.

Those who rated the interns may be from non-poverty backgrounds and may simply be endorsing their own values and behaviors. There is no data to confirm or to deny this. However, for a sizeable group of the interns, at least some ratings were made by team leaders, and for the total group of team leaders now in the Teacher Corps 39% previously lived in poverty and 60% worked in poverty. (These categories are not mutually exclusive.) This gives some indication that at least one possible source of middle class bias in ratings of interns is probably not a difficulty for us. Further, faculty and staff for these programs were picked on the basis of their knowledge and understanding of poverty cultures and the special ethos and problems thereof.

Even if it is true that there is a relationship between poverty experience and success in these programs, there are limits on the generality of the implications. In the first place, these were preservice programs; of much more interest will be dependent variables based upon actual performance in the field and accomplishment in the general effort to educate the disadvantaged as measured during the inservice phase of the Teacher Corps program. Perhaps direct personal experience in poverty will have advantages for this work that do not show up in the preservice university programs.

The Teacher Corps is a professional training program. Many

other programs have shown (though so far there is no good test of poor vs non-poor) that the poor can become useful poverty workers in non-professional roles. Therefore, there is no basis in these data for any statements that the poor do worse (or better) than the non-poor in poverty programs in general.

However, it may be true that the myth of the superiority of the poor as poverty workers has no foundation in fact, and if this is the case then other reasons must be offered for their special involvement in poverty programs in policy making and high-level staff positions. There are, of course, other reasons, all of which might be tested. We believe, that good practive requires empirical tests of undemonstrated assumptions wherever possible.

AC: Academic Performance
TFP: Teaching and Field Performance
RD: Relationship with the Disadvantaged
PSS: Personal Stability & Strength
IE: Interpersonal Effectiveness
CGP: Commitment and General Promise

RATING VARIABLES

Variables

		AC	TFP	RD	PSS	TE	CGP
Poverty Groups	N	-.04	-.13	-.19	-.19	-.16	-.10
	N+	.48	.39	.46	.43	.45	.34
	L	-.03	-.01	.08	.06	.00	.17
	W	-.43	.11	.23	-.12	.04	-.32
	B	-.03	.06	.17	-.12	-.02	-.03

Table 1. Mean standard scores for poverty experience groups for each variable.

Table 2

Variable AC	SS	DF	MS	F
Among	(9.47)	(4)	2.37	3.30*
N+ vs Others	7.38	1	7.38	10.28**
Among Others	2.09	3	.70	
Within	131.34	183	.718	
Total	180.54	187		

Table 3

Variable TFP	SS	DF	MS	F
Among	(5.24)	(4)	1.31	1.48
N+ vs Others	5.06	1	5.06	5.72*
Among Others	0.18	3	.06	
Within	143.38	162	.885	
Total	148.61	166		

Table 4

Variable RD	SS	DF	MS	F
Among	(7.49)	(4)	1.87	2.22+
N+ vs Others	4.49	1	4.49	5.33*
Among Others	3.00	3	1.00	
Within	117.07	139	.842	
Total	124.56	143		

\+ - Sig. at .10 level
* - Sig. at .05 level
** - Sig. at .01 level

Table 5

Variable PSS

	SS	DF	MS	F
Among	(8.72)	(4)	2.18	2.33+
N+ vs. Others	5.53	1	5.53	5.92*
Among Others	3.19	3	1.06	
Within	178.33	191	.934	
Total	187.05	195		

Table 6

Variable IE	SS	DF	MS	F
Among	(8.07)	(4)	2.02	2.12+
N+ vs Others	6.93	1	6.93	7.26**
Among Others	1.14	3	.38	
Within	182.35	191	.955	
Total	190.42	195		

Table 7

Variable CGP

	SS	DF	MS	F
Among	(6.86)	(4)	1.72	1.81
N+ vs Others	6.64	1	6.64	7.00**
Among Others	.22	3	.07	
Within	180.04	190	.948	
Total	186.90	194		

\+ - Sig. at .10 level
* - Sig. at .05 level
** - Sig. at .01 level

Table 8. Age and Poverty experience.

Less than 23	14	52
24 and above	3	42

$\chi^2 = 3.32$, $.10 > p > .05$ (2-tailed test)
$.05 \; p \; .025$ (1-tailed test)

Table 9. Race and Poverty experience. Expected frequency for cell C is 4.

	N+	N,L,W,B
White	14	69
Negro	3	25

$\chi^2 = .23$, $.50 > p > .70$ (2-tailed test)

Table 10. Sex and Poverty experience.

	N+	N,L,W,B
Male	7	49
Female	10	.47

$\chi^2 = .24$, $.50 > p > .70$ (2-tailed test)